

Setting up a branch women's group

A toolkit for action and change





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Introduction

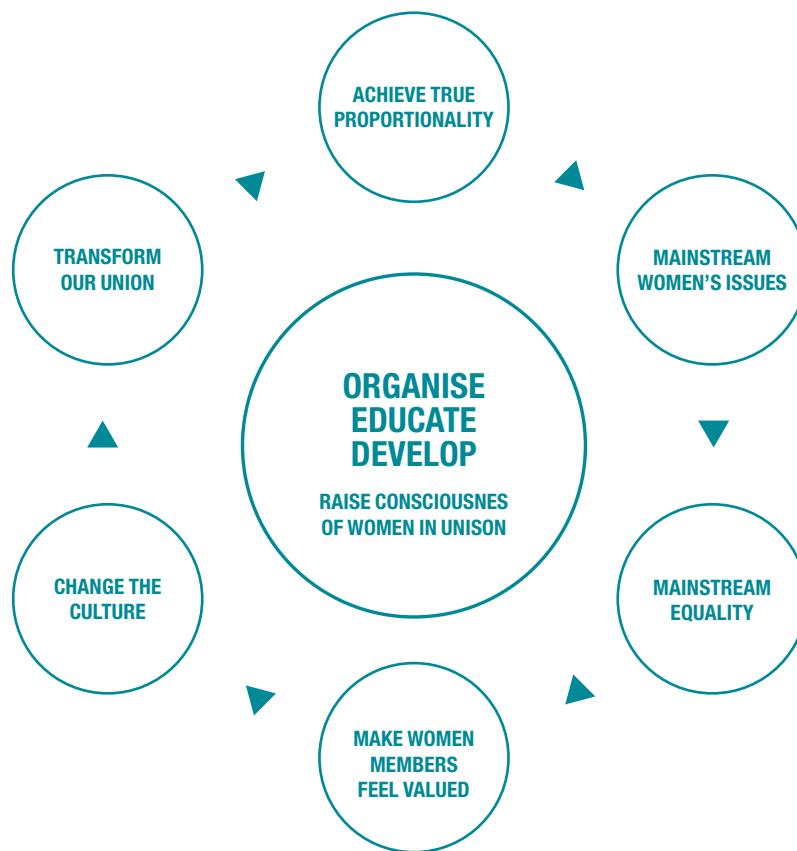
UNISON has a rule book commitment to support women's self organisation, and an essential part of that is enabling women members to meet, to share their concerns and to take forward the issues that are important to them

This guide sets out the purpose and the benefits of branch women's groups, and gives practical advice on how to establish, facilitate and sustain an effective branch women's group.

It also highlights some of the practical problems faced by women members in engaging with our union, and suggests ways in which the barriers can be overcome.

A branch women's group can:

- encourage greater involvement in UNISON activities and issues
- enable women's voices to be heard
- promote women's issues
- build the confidence of women members
- allow women to network
- assist in achieving proportionality in our union
- be fun!



Why have branch women's groups?

There are many reasons why women within a UNISON branch may wish to have their own forum for information and debate, and many benefits for branches in providing that space. These are some of the reasons why a branch women's group is important

To encourage greater involvement in UNISON activities and issues

To be an effective branch, it is essential to grow the membership and increase the participation of members, particularly those who have traditionally faced barriers to becoming more involved in union activity. More women than men are joining trade unions now as they are the most vulnerable members of the public sector workforce and have borne the brunt of austerity in the UK. By involving more women in trade union activity and mainstreaming 'women's issues', branches will encourage more women to join; improve communications with the workforce and present a strong and united front to employers.

To enable women to be heard

Historically trade union branches have been dominated by men, and the agenda has concentrated on issues which have not been inclusive of all members' concerns. Research has shown that the route into trade unionism for many women is because they wished to challenge an injustice which directly affected them and other women. To have their voice heard within UNISON is therefore especially important to women members. Branch women's groups give women that opportunity.

To promote women's issues

The traditional trade union agenda has not progressed issues of particular relevance to women members. Involvement in branch women's groups allows issues which have not previously been considered important to be raised and action taken. This improves women's working lives, increases the sense of pride in being part of a campaigning organisation and acts as an incentive for other women to join and become involved.

To build women's confidence

The opportunity for women to share experiences can have a positive effect on women's self esteem, allowing women to feel valued and respected. Increased confidence can empower women to challenge inequality and inappropriate behaviour; apply for promotional opportunities; and become involved in UNISON and community activities.

To provide a space for women to network

Women-only gatherings provide the space for women to speak openly and freely about personal issues that may be causing concern in the workplace. Issues such as sexual harassment and the adverse impact of sickness monitoring on women-specific health conditions may not be issues they wish to raise within a whole branch committee with male stewards and branch officers present. A branch women's group gives the opportunity for women to receive advice and support from other women who may have direct experience of the same problems, and may help to identify an institutional workplace problem which the branch should be dealing with.

To achieve proportionality

UNISON has at its heart a commitment to the principle of proportionality (and fair representation) – for all structures and levels to be properly reflective of the membership. Branch women's groups provide a supportive and accepting forum for women to learn more about UNISON, enabling them to increase their level of involvement and ultimately to grow the next generation of trade union activists.

There is a UNISON toolkit Getting the Balance Right which specifically addresses this issue. (See the resources section of this guide).

To be fun!

Branch women's groups can be innovative in how they operate; committee meetings are not a requirement; formality is not always essential and women can spend time together, learn together and enjoy being part of UNISON.

The advantages

The disadvantages are few. Primarily the people who feel that branch women's groups are not worthwhile tend to be those threatened by the increasing level of awareness and involvement that a branch women's group can achieve. They may resist setting up the group to protect their own position and maintain the status quo. But the advantages of having branch women's groups for the women involved, the branch and even the employers are many, as shown overleaf.

Who benefits from branch women's groups?

Women members

- Increased awareness of employment, social and community issues
- Higher self esteem and confidence = empowerment
- Increased dialogue of women workers across the organisation's hierarchy
- Greater understanding of the opportunities and benefits of being active in the union
- Increased confidence and knowledge to assist and encourage other members
- Increased understanding of women's issues

UNISON

- Greater pool of experience and expertise within the branch
- Raised profile of UNISON at local level has a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of members
- Increased organisation and representation capacity
- Proportionality is achieved

Employers

- Support for equality initiatives
- Women employees are more likely to realise their potential
- Increased motivation for women staff
- Better informed staff
- Networking of women staff aids organisational communication



UNISON's rule book commitments

UNISON's rule book has, as a central theme, equality and increasing the participation of under-represented groups. UNISON calls these principles self organisation, proportionality and fair representation

Self organisation

The UNISON rule book enshrines the principles of self organisation. There are four self organised groups (SOGs) – Black members, disabled members, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members and women members. Young members have a national forum.

The self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to identify and promote our equality agenda, including monitoring proportionality and fair representation. Self organisation can and should be a vibrant and dynamic part of UNISON.

Self organisation matters because women, Black, disabled and LGBT people face discrimination every day. Often such discrimination extends into their working lives and may lead to them being treated less equally in relation to jobs, promotion, training and recruitment.

Each national and regional SOG has developed its own way of operating. Women's self organisation works hard to ensure that the full diversity of women are included within its structures, but the primary focus must be on ensuring proportionality within UNISON and challenging where it is not applied fairly.

Proportionality and fair representation

Proportionality is defined within the UNISON rule book as “the representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members comprising the electorate” (Rule Q – definitions).

UNISON rules also address the issue of fair representation, which is defined as “the broad balance of representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as age and low pay, the balance between full time and part time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity (Rule D.2.12.3).

However, proportionality takes priority over fair representation – women must be proportionately represented before race, age, sexual orientation or other factors are taken into consideration.

Almost 80% of UNISON members are women – around 1 million women members. However, this is not yet reflected in UNISON's structures, where the balance of branch secretaries, chairs and stewards is still around 50/50. The Getting the Balance Right toolkit is designed to provide strategies to change this situation, so that women in senior posts, in conference delegations and on committees are properly and proportionately represented.

Taking action

The first step to equality is to acknowledge that there are barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups and members. The second step is to remove the barriers and take action. Equality and inclusion will not be achieved overnight, but with the support, commitment and understanding of all members, it is possible to achieve this in the future. Proportionality, fair representation and self organisation are all measures that will assist this positive action and change.

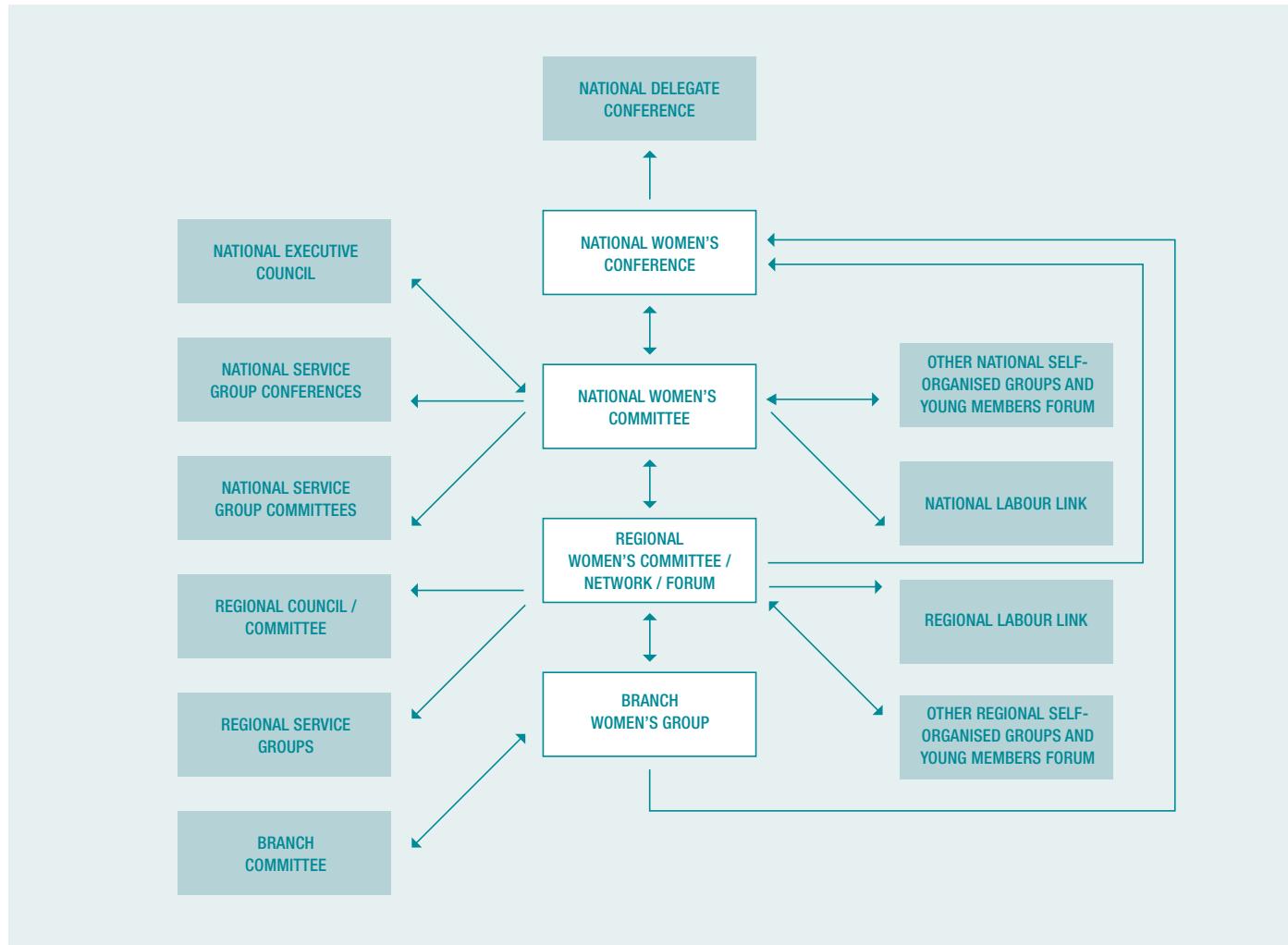
The role of self organised groups (Rule D.5)

D.5.3 ... Self organised groups shall:

- .1 meet to share concerns and aspirations, and establish their own priorities
- .2 elect their own representatives to other levels of self organisation and to other appropriate levels of the union's organisation
- .3 have adequate and agreed funding and other resources, including education and training access, publicity and communications
- .4 work within a flexible structure to build confidence and encourage participation and provide opportunities for the fuller involvement of disadvantaged members
- .5 work within the established policies, rules and constitutional provisions of the Union.

The full extract from the rule book is set out as Appendix A to this guide.

Women's self organisation and UNISON structures



Setting up a branch women's group

The role of the branch and who can help

The Code of Good Branch Practice

Branches are encouraged, within the code of good branch practice, to develop self organisation as part of their regular review of organisation and activity. The code recognises the benefit of self organisation in increasing member participation and strengthening organisation.

Branch rules

Branch rules should include reference to UNISON's commitment to self organisation, and should include financial support as outlined in the rule book, the code of good branch practice and the Getting Organised guide to self organisation.

Engaging women members

Talk to women members, stewards and branch officers about setting up a group. They may be willing to take a lead and/or have suggestions for women who would be interested in being involved. If a branch has already elected a branch women's officer, she is the obvious person to lead on this, with support from other branch officers and activists. If not, the branch should consider creating an additional branch officer post of branch women's officer, as permitted within the rule book, specifically to support the branch women's group (more information later in this guide).

If the branch is approached by a woman member who is keen to be involved, offer her the support and expertise of the branch to get the group underway.

Branch support

Arrange for the issue to be discussed within the branch committee and/or branch general meeting. Share this guide and other guidance/handbooks referred to with the committee in advance of the meeting, to ensure that those present are familiar with the principles of self organisation, proportionality and fair representation. Discussions should include how the group will be funded.

The branch education officer

The branch education officer has a remit to ensure that branch officers and stewards receive appropriate training to help with their duties. They may already know of members

in the branch who are willing to support self organisation, and may have resources available, including information on women-only courses.

The branch equality co-ordinator

Included in the role of the branch equality co-ordinator is the responsibility to:

- advise and support the development of branch SOGs on behalf of the branch committee
- advise the branch committee on the development and monitoring of the action plan to achieve proportionality and fair representation
- develop and promote training opportunities for all under-represented members and activists within the branch.

They should have access to resources to support the establishment of a branch women's group, and can act as liaison between the branch and women members whilst the group gets underway.

Support from the regional office

You can also get information and advice about setting up a branch women's group from your regional office – either from your regional organiser or the officer with responsibility for the regional women's SOG.



The practicalities

Organising meetings

Is there interest in a group?

When considering setting up a branch women's group, it is important to find out what other women members think. A simple survey of members will help with this. Attached as Appendix C is a sample survey, both to help determine the level of interest and the topics that women may wish to see discussed. These could be distributed via stewards to encourage discussion about the group, or via email/newsletter. There are also a number of free online survey tools you can use, or you could consider using social media.

The response to surveys can often be disappointing – even professional surveys often get only around a 30% response. The branch could consider offering a prize draw for those who complete and return the survey, which will almost certainly increase the response rate.

Contacting all women members

The branch or RMS staff at regional office will be able to provide a list of all women members, who can be contacted directly.

While most members will have email, which is a quick and easy way to let women know about the group and meetings, not all members have ready access so it is important that this is not the only method of communication.

An article in the branch newsletter is also a good way to contact women members, or consider a specific women's newsletter, working with the branch communications officer.

In very big branches, with thousands of members spread over a large geographical area, it may be more manageable to start by having women-only meetings that focus on a specific issue in a central location.

A sample poster to advertise the meetings is attached as Appendix D.

Make sure the meetings are relevant to women

To begin with, topics identified from the survey can be scheduled for discussion. Once meetings are underway it is important to keep them relevant and involve the members in decisions about what is on the agenda. Some topics for consideration include:

- pensions
- bullying and harassment in the workplace
- work life balance
- childcare
- education and training
- career progression / the glass ceiling
- lone working
- domestic abuse and violence
- women's health issues
- women's history
- caring issues
- ageism.

There might also be a range of issues which your employer is dealing with that have a specific women's perspective that you may be able to arrange a meeting to discuss.

Make meetings accessible

Support women with dependant responsibilities

Many women have caring responsibilities which may be a barrier to them becoming involved in the women's group. Consider offering care allowances (not all care is for young children) and/or providing a crèche to support these women to attend.

Ensure meetings are held at convenient times

Seek members' views on this. The member survey should help identify the most convenient time, but consider also varying times to give more women the opportunity to attend. Hold meetings during working hours if that is possible, and keep to the times advertised – start and finish on time to ensure that women are able to plan travel, shifts, cover for caring responsibilities etc. Paid time off may be possible, but the branch would need to negotiate this with the employer(s).

Ensure meetings are at suitable venues

Hold the meeting in the workplace if possible, to minimise costs and maximise convenience for the women attending. If the workplace is not an option, be wary of using a pub as an alternative – there are many reasons why this might have an adverse impact on the number of women attending. Also consider whether travel allowances are possible if necessary; whether women can arrange to travel together; public transport links; safe parking; whether the space is fully accessible for disabled women.



Make the meeting welcoming

Wherever the meeting is held, make sure it is a friendly and comfortable environment, preferably an informal setting. Provide refreshments appropriate to the timing, funded by the branch.

Publicise the meetings

Ensure the meeting is well publicised, and that all the relevant information is included – a sample flyer which can be adapted for email is attached as Appendix D. Use branch noticeboards, newsletters, emails and social media to get the message out.

Encourage active involvement in the meeting

It is important to ensure that all the women who want to speak have the chance to do so, and that no one monopolises the meeting. This will encourage women to return to the group.

- make new members feel welcome
- appoint a chair, and ask that everyone introduces themselves
- make the format flexible and informal
- make procedures understandable
- avoid (or explain) jargon, abbreviations and initials
- limit the length of contributions
- allow all views to be represented – but be aware of UNISON's working together guidelines (appendix E).

Promote the group's success

Provide a report of the meeting(s) for the branch newsletter, to raise the profile of the group and encourage more women to attend. Also report back to the branch committee on progress and successes, and ensure that the issues raised by the group are reported widely. Keep the regional women's organiser /contact/network informed of the work of the group.

Don't give up!

Given the opportunity, time and encouragement, many women actively wish to be involved and attend women's events – at branch, regional and national level. There is no golden formula for success in setting up a branch group. If the response is not as great as hoped initially, consider changing the format and try again.

The practicalities

A checklist

- Survey members – is there interest in a group? What topics do they want to discuss?
- Contact all women members and let them know about the group/meetings
- Keep meetings relevant
- Make meetings accessible – in all respects
- Publicise the meetings
- Encourage active involvement in the meeting
- Promote the group's success



The practicalities

Case study

Over the last few years a strong women's presence has emerged at Southampton local government branch, where 81% of the members are women.

The election of a young woman branch secretary, following the retirement of the long serving incumbent, coincided with the increased participation of women members in the branch, and an increasing number of women activists. They have joined together to recruit, organise and campaign on local and national issues and have been allocated a budget to assist with all of the group's activities, conference and training courses.

We are very lucky that our branch has a strong women's presence and that the women's group has the support of the branch secretary and branch committee. Sometime it can seem such hard work and you feel about to give up – but don't, you must persevere as it is definitely worth it so don't be put off. All of this work generates new activists and gives women a voice in their union.



The work of the women's group is led by Cathy Roblin, branch women's officer and full time convenor. One of Cathy's first tasks was to ensure that women members were being communicated with and she developed a regular 'women's newsletter' which goes out to women members every two months. Another early task was to ensure that every March, around international women's day, the branch was holding women specific events as a means to raise awareness about women's equality issues as well as an aid to recruitment and organising.

As a result, the branch have been actively engaged in:

- running workshops at the branch and region which looked at the challenges for EU migrant women working in social care, how to challenge difficult attitudes and behaviour that are borne out of prejudice and intolerance;
- local campaigning and fundraising for women's services, including women's domestic violence services and refuges;
- participating in national protests and demonstrations on women's issues such as Million Women Rise and locally in Reclaim the Night marches in Portsmouth and Southampton.
- sending delegates to national women's conference, the regional women's forum and women's training courses, and organising assertiveness training;

In 2016 the branch also took an equal pay claim for some of the council's lowest paid staff, winning over £1 million for some the lowest paid women workers whilst maintaining their terms and conditions which were under threat of being watered down and/or some elements being phased out. The majority of the women worked as carers and a large number were EU migrant women workers. Between 300 and 350 women benefited from back pay of anywhere between £900 and £10,000 each.

The women activists in the branch are acutely aware of the importance of supporting each other.

If it wasn't for the support of other women, the branch women's officer and the regional women's training programme I wouldn't still be here as branch secretary. All were vital in increasing my confidence and skills to meet the challenges of running a large branch.

Options for actions

Things that a branch women's group can do

Inside UNISON

- Elect and send delegates to the regional women's committee
- Elect delegate(s) to national women's conference
- Submit motions to national women's conference
- Send representatives/delegations to the branch committee to raise issues – including ensuring proportionality in the branch, the branch equality plan etc
- Submit a motion to the branch committee
- Submit a motion to regional committee/council (with branch support)
- Work with the other SOGs on joint campaigns/issues of common interest

In society

- Contact local voluntary/community groups eg Rape Crisis, Abortion Rights, Fawcett Society and build alliances
- Invite guest speakers to meetings – including your regional women's organiser/regional organiser
- Join in marches, demonstrations, protests – Reclaim the Night, Million Women Rise etc
- Organise letter writing campaigns
- Organise stalls in the town centre to promote events UNISON supports
- Affiliate to other organisations with common goals (may need branch approval).

In the workplace

- Produce a women's newsletter
- Ask to be consulted on workplace issues
- Post leaflets and flyers about the meetings and events the group support
- Organise learning events and lunchtime briefings



The branch women's officer

Members may feel that women's issues are not prioritised in the branch and/or that the employer does not treat women's issues seriously.

Electing a branch women's officer (BWO) offers the opportunity to bring about important changes for women in the workplace. UNISON can provide training for the role, and the BWO can network and work collaboratively with other branch women's officers in their area. They can become involved in the regional women's committee/forum or network, attend national women's conference and help UNISON agree its work plan priorities for the national women's committee. The branch women's officer is an important role in UNISON.

What the BWO role is:

- identifying women members of the branch, and liaising with the branch committee on progress towards proportionality
- being a focal point for women's issues for members and raising issues affecting women, particularly those with service conditions implications, with the branch committee
- building links with women's sector organisations and where appropriate signposting to specialist organisations for women (domestic abuse/Rape Crisis) and assisting in negotiations on employer policies on violence against women
- supporting women in their issues generally and campaigning on issues that are important to women
- organising a women's group and identifying concerns
- ensuring that the branch has a wide range of resources for women, such as books, videos and leaflets, and making these resources accessible to all women in the branch.

Why this role is important for your branch:

- to ensure women's views are known
- to increase women's confidence
- to encourage women to get involved in UNISON
- to influence decision making in the branch
- to influence negotiating priorities with your employer
- to build links with the regional women's committee.

Frequently asked questions

Q Why isn't there a men's group?

Trade unions have traditionally been male dominated and, like much of society, men have held most if not all positions of power. This is still true in UNISON where half of all senior branch posts are held by men, whilst women make up more than three quarters of our union. Women have often not had access to these roles for varied reasons and, because men have not lived with the impact of societal and institutional discrimination, there is less need for men to set up such groups. There is no provision in UNISON's rules for the setting up of branch men's groups.

Q Do I have to be a steward if I come along?

No, attendance is open to any woman member of the branch. Coming to the group does not commit you to any further involvement in the branch, unless it is something you want to do. We want more women to get involved, but it is your choice.

Q What's UNISON got to do with me?

UNISON is not just here to deal with problems when they arise – although clearly that is part of the role. UNISON also negotiates on your behalf, locally, regionally and nationally, with your employer. But if UNISON does not know what is important to you, it cannot tackle those issues. UNISON relies on its members – without your input it is a poorer organisation.

Q Will I get time off to attend the women's group meeting?

This will depend on your branch's agreement with the employer. You should speak to your steward, branch women's officer, branch equality co-ordinator or branch secretary if you want to attend a meeting during your normal working hours, and they can try and negotiate paid time off for you.

Q I already have a very busy life – how will this help?

Women typically fulfil many roles, and time is a precious commodity. But we know from experience that when women spend time investing in themselves and learning about issues their confidence and ability grows, and that helps them in other areas of their life. Also, a problem shared is very often time well spent, and you will get lots of support from the other women in the group.

Q Why do we just talk about women's issues?

What is a women's issue? Women are 55% of the population, and every issue is a women's issue. Every decision your employer, local authority, health authority or government makes will have implications for women, and a women's perspective that they may not have thought through, or been made aware of.

Q Why are you not concentrating on more important issues, like better pay?

Pay, and the lack of equal pay, is one of the key issues for UNISON. Women are still paid much less than men – the gender pay gap is around 19%, despite equal pay legislation. We are trying to do something about it – come to the meetings, find out what and maybe be part of the solution.

Q Will the group be full of feminists? I don't want to be thought of as one of them.

Despite the negative way the word is used by the media, being a feminist simply means that you believe in equality between the sexes, that men and women should be treated equally. What is negative about that? Shouldn't we all believe in that?

Appendix A

Extract from the UNISON rule book

(Rule) D.5 Self organised groups

- 5.1 The Union shall promote opportunities for the following groups to organise activities to meet the purposes set out below:
- .1 women members
 - .2 Black members
 - .3 disabled members
 - .4 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members.
- 5.2 The purposes of self-organisation shall be, within the framework of the Rules of the Union, to assist the union to:
- .1 promote the union's equalities and bargaining agenda
 - .2 defend jobs, terms and conditions and services
 - .3 build its density and have a strong and dynamic presence in the workplace.
- 5.3 To this end, self organised groups shall:
- .1 meet to share concerns and aspirations, and establish their own priorities
 - .2 elect their own representatives to other levels of self organisation and to other appropriate levels of the Union's organisation
 - .3 have adequate and agreed funding and other resources, including education and training access, publicity and communications
 - .4 work within a flexible structure to build confidence and encourage participation and provide opportunities for the fuller involvement of disadvantaged members
 - .5 work within the established policies, rules and constitutional provisions of the Union.
- 5.4 To further these purposes:
- .1 The National Executive Council shall provide guidelines setting out the basis for operation of the self-organised groups and their representation, which guidelines shall include
 - (a) the procedure by which the existence of particular groups may be recognised at branch, regional or national level
 - (b) provision for a recognised group to receive funding at the appropriate level.
- 5.5 Where such recognised groups exist at branch level:
- .1 they may elect representatives to the branch committee in accordance with branch rules
 - .2 they may formulate proposals, motions and other initiatives for branch meetings or the branch committee
 - .3 reports on their activities shall be included in the annual report of the branch
 - .4 the branch shall give them financial support within the Union's guidelines.
- 5.6 Where such recognised groups exist at regional level:
- .1 a regional committee for each group may be created, consisting of representatives of each relevant group at branch level, and the regional women's committee shall also include women members of the Regional Committee
 - .2 a regional group may formulate proposals, motions or other initiatives to the Regional Council and Regional Committee
 - .3 a regional group shall be represented on the Regional Committee by a representative with full voting rights
 - .4 a regional group shall appoint one or more delegates to the Regional Council as may be approved by the National Executive Council
 - .5 a report on a regional group's activities shall be made to the annual meeting of the Regional Council
 - .6 the Regional Council shall give a regional group financial support within the Union's guidelines.
- 5.7 Where such a recognised group exists at national level:
- .1 the group may establish a national committee, as well as a national conference or national meeting of representatives from branch and regional groups
 - .2 a group's national committee shall consist of no more than two representatives per region, except where the distribution of members merits an additional representative
 - .3 the National Executive Council shall have the right to send women members of the National Executive Council to the national women's committee and conference
 - .4 a national committee or national conference may send motions, proposals or initiatives to the National Executive Council
 - .5 the group may, subject to the Union's rules, send delegates and motions to the National Delegate Conference and to each Service Group's National Conference
 - .6 the group shall provide an annual report of its activities to its Conference and the National Executive Council
 - .7 the National Executive Council shall give a national group financial support within the Union's guidelines.
- 5.8 The arrangements for self-organisation shall be regularly reviewed by the National Executive Council in consultation with the group concerned. In particular, the National Executive Council shall seek to promote the involvement of members and representatives of the groups in the activities of the Union, in the light of the principles of fair representation and proportionality.

Appendix B

Example model constitution

UNISON ... branch women's self organised group

The ... branch women's self-organised group recognises that, for many and varied reasons, women's issues and concerns about their employment and workplace may not be sufficiently heard in branch committee meetings.

1 Objectives

The aims and objectives of the branch women's SOG are:

1. to provide a friendly and supportive environment in which to discuss issues and develop a clear feminist agenda focused on change;
2. to work towards change for individual women members (including supporting women members through workplace issues/problems/cases);
3. bring about change for all women in the branch through positive campaigning and the promotion of women's rights and equality.

2 The role of the branch women's SOG

The group is:

1. convened by the branch women's officer*
2. responsible for developing its own priorities based on the issues and concerns raised by members as well as information from the regional women's committee and policies decided at national women's conference;
3. open to all women members of UNISON xxxx branch, who may attend meetings and participate in any of the activities organised;
4. accountable to, and communicates with, all women members in the branch;
5. committed to encouraging greater participation of women members in the branch and at regional and national level in UNISON, including electing delegates to national women's conference;
6. committed to publicising and encouraging women to attend UNISON education and training courses;
7. an integral part of the branch and operates within UNISON rules, including reporting to (where appropriate) and being accountable to the branch.

3 Organisation

1. The frequency of meetings, agenda, format and venue will be flexible and will be decided by the members of the group, in consultation with the branch women's officer*, who will be responsible for the administration of the group.
2. From time to time, speakers and relevant local groups may be invited to address and inform the group.
3. The group will produce a newsletter x times each year which will be sent to all women members.
4. All reasonable expenses, including dependent care, will be paid by the branch for attendance at meetings. Funding will also be provided for refreshments and agreed activities.
5. The branch women's officer* will provide an annual report to the branch and regular reports on any significant issues agreed by the SOG for campaigning or communication to the wider membership.
6. The SOG may also give advice on specific social, workplace or political issues of concern to women, and will contribute to discussions and consultation on issues raised by the branch committee or employer, where appropriate.

4 Constitution

This Constitution may be amended by the ... branch women's SOG at their annual general meeting, and a copy forwarded to the branch secretary for information.

*Or the branch equality co-ordinator or other appropriate woman branch officer where a branch women's officer does not exist.

Appendix C

Survey of women members

It is now very easy to do a simple online survey through a number of free online services – SurveyMonkey® for example, or a doodle poll of dates for meetings. Our research has shown that the vast majority of our members use smartphones or tablets regularly, but not all members have easy access or are comfortable using such technology, so you should consider other ways to reach members. However you do it, these are some sample questions which you may wish to use.

UNISON is bound by data protection legislation – please include the paragraph at the end of the survey, and ensure that you comply with UNISON's policy.

Women in UNISON

Interested in a branch women's group?

This is a short survey about your views on having a branch women's group, and what members would expect/want from such a group.

Please complete the form and return it by ... (date)

► How long have you been a member of UNISON?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year | <input type="checkbox"/> One to four years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Four to ten years | <input type="checkbox"/> More than ten years |

► Where is your workplace?

► Please identify your work pattern – tick all that apply

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full time | <input type="checkbox"/> Part time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job share | <input type="checkbox"/> Term time only |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shift worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Zero hours/bank |

► Have you ever attended a women's group meeting before?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

► If your answer was no, is there a particular reason and is there anything the group could do to encourage you to come along?

► What kind of meetings would you prefer?

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Formal (with a specific agenda and chair) | <input type="checkbox"/> Informal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Semi formal | |

► Is there a particular time that would suit you to attend branch women's group meetings?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morning | <input type="checkbox"/> Lunchtime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> Evening |

► Is there a particular venue that you would prefer or think would be suitable for the group to meet in?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A meeting room at work | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A meeting room outside of the workplace | |

► Do you have any suggestions?

Other – please specify

► Which kinds of subjects would interest you enough to come along? A few suggestions are listed below, but it would be really helpful if you would add some others.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current news and issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Pensions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harassment and bullying | <input type="checkbox"/> Equal pay |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with stress | <input type="checkbox"/> Health and safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women's health | <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify |

Have you ever considered becoming more involved in your UNISON branch?

I am already an active member
 Yes No

Name

.....

Address

.....

.....

E-mail

.....

Phone

.....

Data protection – privacy notice

All information that you provide will be held and processed strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Such data will be used by UNISON to administer your membership record and our relationship with you as a valued member, and to provide you with information about UNISON's activities and for other trade union related purposes. We may disclose information about you to any of our employees or agents, insofar as reasonably necessary in relation to trade union activities. UNISON will not disclose any of your personally identifiable information to any third party unless we have your permission, or under special circumstances, such as when we believe in good faith that the law requires it. Some of your personal data will be available to UNISON's employees, full time officers, branch officials, workplace representatives and others formally instructed by UNISON for the purposes of carrying out trade union duties.

The type of personal data shared will be relevant to the purpose for which the data is used, so for example, unless you have expressly asked us not to, work place representatives will be given your workplace contact details. UNISON uses industry standard efforts to safeguard the confidentiality of your personally identifiable information, such as firewalls and SSL (secure socket layers). We make every effort to protect the loss, misuse and alteration of information under our control. However, data transmission over the internet is inherently insecure, and we cannot guarantee the security of data sent over the internet. To view UNISON's full privacy policy, please visit unison.org.uk/privacy-policy

(Detail any other courses which may be available)

► Do you have any suggestions for other courses that you might be interested in?

.....

.....

.....

► Are there any other comments you would like to add?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for completing the survey. If you have any questions please contact me – details below. Otherwise, please return the survey to me by no later than ... (date).



**ANY BRANCH
Women's group meeting
(Date)
(Time)
(Venue)**

**Come and join UNISON women
members to discuss issues affecting
women at work and in society, in an
informal friendly group**

Guest speaker:

**Open to all UNISON women members
Refreshments provided**

For more information contact: (Branch women's officer)

Name

Email

Phone number

Appendix E

Working together guidelines

We have probably all – at one time or another – been at the receiving end of others’ discriminatory or abusive attitudes, actions or language. It is therefore particularly important that we are all aware of our own attitudes and actions. We must be willing to constructively challenge each other and be open to challenge ourselves.

The following guidelines have been drawn up to help all of us meet UNISON’s commitments to full participation in a practical and constructive way. We all have an equal right to benefit from our involvement in our union and to contribute to debate and discussion.

Working together

Between us, we have a wealth of experience and ideas. It is important that everyone feels equal and able to make a contribution if they wish, so please:

- Listen to others and avoid being dismissive of their contribution
- Wait until a speaker has finished and do not interrupt their train of thought
- Aim to have reasoned discussion, not argument
- Try to make criticism constructive so that it helps others develop confidence, skills and knowledge
- Make your own contribution as clear and concise as possible and do not dominate the discussion
- Ensure that everyone who wishes to speak is given the encouragement and opportunity to do so.
- It is important that people can speak openly about problems in the knowledge that personal or sensitive information is restricted to the group – confidentiality must be respected,

Harassment

There must be no harassment or bullying at any time. Harassment and bullying create an unpleasant and/or intimidating atmosphere and should be challenged.

It is important to remember that what is important is not necessarily the action, but how the recipient feels about what has been done.

Language

UNISON aims to be inclusive of all its members, enabling them to participate in all our activities. This brings with it a responsibility for all of us to make sure that we do not use language which others might find offensive. This means thinking about, for example, how you talk about individuals or groups. It means avoiding making statements, comments, or jokes that are based on your own or others’ prejudice about individuals or groups of people. The language

we use is extremely important and reflects deep rooted and long-standing societal power structures and beliefs. Discriminatory language of any description will not be tolerated. Generalisations are seldom helpful and seldom true. Please avoid making them. Jokes or comments based on any type of discrimination should not be made.

Jargon

Jargon is a barrier to good communication. The more we become involved in trade union work, or in any other group, the more likely we are to use jargon. So explain any jargon or initials that you use so that everyone understands what you are talking about.

Timekeeping

Members are responsible for their own timekeeping, but it is important not to disrupt meetings by a late arrival, and not to exclude others by, for example, extending a set end time when others may have commitments.

Smoking

All UNISON meetings are non-smoking (including e-cigarettes). Other people’s cigarette smoke is not only unpleasant and potentially harmful but may also be an access issue for some people.

Mobile phones

Making or taking phone calls during meetings is not acceptable. Please switch them off or turn them to silent and leave the room if you must take an urgent call. This also applies to other mobile devices unless you are using them as part of the meeting eg researching as part of the group, note taking – or for access reasons.

Socialising

The time we spend informally socialising is extremely important. We hope that everyone finds this time valuable and enjoyable. This means ensuring that everyone feels free to join in if they want, while not putting pressure on individuals to fall in with a group if they do not want to, for example by drinking alcohol or moving on to a pub/café.

Conclusion

We trust that all members will understand the principles underlying these guidelines. If they are followed, everyone can feel secure and contribute as much as possible to the group – and hopefully enjoy themselves!

Appendix F

UNISON resources supporting women members

unison.org.uk/women

This is the website section for women members and women's self-organised groups. Useful resources can be found listed at the bottom of the webpage including:

- [Women in UNISON campaigning handbook 2017-2018](#)

This is updated each year following national women's conference. It is a key tool for getting women involved in campaigns which are important to UNISON's women members, as identified at national women's conference each year.

- [Model equality and diversity policy and guide](#)

- [Women's mental health issues: not to be ignored at work](#)

- [Women's health issues: a workplace issue](#)

- [Pregnancy: your rights at work](#)

- [Counting the cost: how council cuts shrink women's lives \(from 2014\)](#)

UNISON's analysis of responses from councils across the UK and women surveyed about their experiences of cuts.

- [Women deserve better: a better deal for women aged 50 and over in employment \(from 2014\)](#)

UNISON commissioned a large-scale survey to examine the emerging patterns and trends in discrimination being experienced by older women in the workplace.

unison.org.uk/get-involved/learning-development/activists/negotiating-and-bargaining

In-depth guides and model agreements for effective negotiating and bargaining including:

- [Flexible working guidance](#)

- [Gender pay reporting](#)

- [Medical screening leave factsheet](#)

- [Menopause factsheet](#)

- [Negotiating for working parents](#)

- [Women's reproductive health issues](#)

unison.org.uk/onlinecatalogue

- [Organising for equality: UNISON guidelines on self-organisation, stock number 1577](#)

- [A guide to equality in UNISON, stock number 2778](#)

- [Harassment at work – a UNISON guide, stock number 1359](#)

- [Domestic violence and abuse: a trade union issue, stock number 3477](#)

- [We won't look the other way: domestic abuse poster,](#)

[stock number 2539](#)

- [We won't look the other way: domestic abuse leaflet, stock number 3558](#)
- [Menopause and work stock number 3075](#)
- [Gender, safety and health, stock number 1982](#)
- [Getting the balance right stock number 3714](#)

UNISON's rules and guidance for branches, including funding of women's (and other self organised) groups

- [Code of good branch practice](#), stock number 224272

- [The UNISON rule book | How we work | UNISON](#)
National order by telephone 020 7121 5131

Keeping informed

www.unison.org.uk/women

www.facebook.com/unisonwomen

Twitter @WomenInUNISON

are used to promote our own campaigns and those which UNISON supports, share information and raise awareness of the work we are doing.

The women's e-bulletin is sent to all women activists registered on our membership database. If you are not included but would like to receive a copy you can opt in by emailing women@unison.co.uk. This is also the email address for any general queries you may have.

Regional advice

All UNISON regions have a member of UNISON staff working with the regional women's SOG. You can contact them by calling your regional office – the contact details are here

www.unison.org.uk/regions

Further reading

[I knew I could do this work](#)

Seven strategies that promote women's activism and leadership in unions by Amy Caiazza (December 2007)

